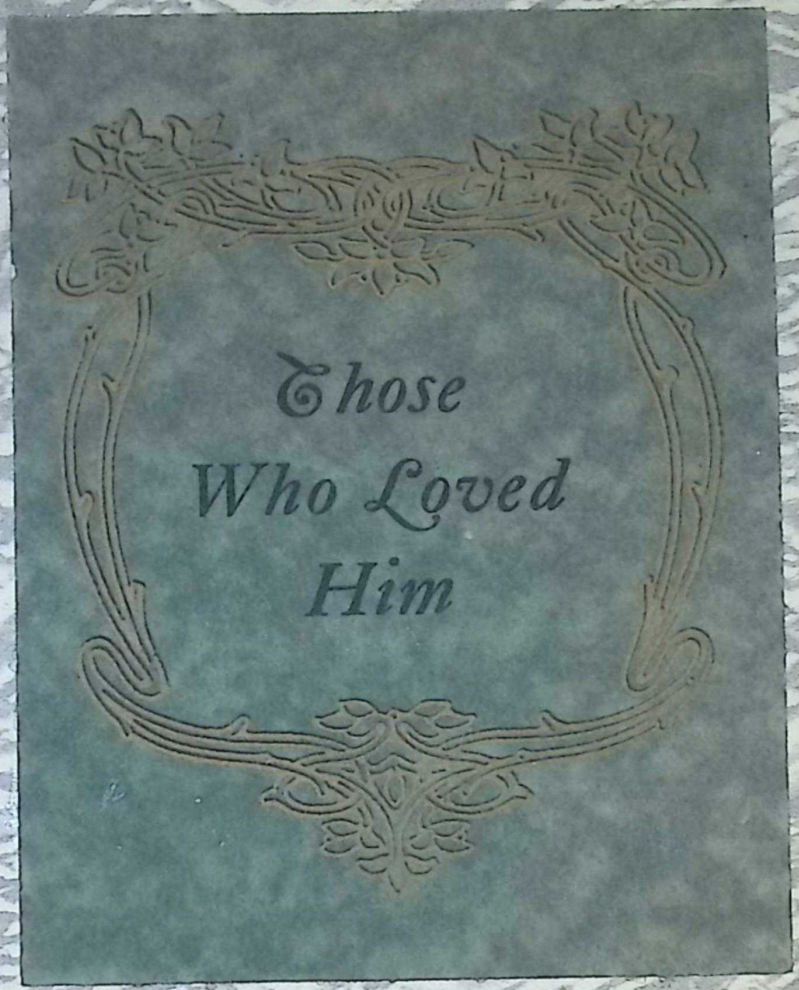


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# Those Who Loved Him

BY

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# Those Who Loved Him

## His Mother

MARY was just a simple Jewish maid. We love to think of her as beautiful. She certainly had the beauty of a pure sweet spirit prepared of God for the great honor which was to be put upon her. Poor in this world's so-called treasures she was yet rich in the sincere love of a noble, good man to whom she was betrothed. He proved his tender affection for her by his prompt obedience to the angel's mandate to shield her with his name. Into Mary's innocent, uneventful girl life wonderful happenings had come of late. She had seen an angel who had given her a message straight from God.

Her heart was so full of that mysterious message she must needs tell it to some one. It was a long trip to the "hill country of Judea," but she made all the haste she could for the news she had to tell was urging her, and when she reached the home of her cousin, Elizabeth, the wife of the good priest Zacharias, her strange greeting was: "Blessed art thou among women!" The very words of the angel. What could it mean? Such words of respect and honor to an humble Jewish maid? To the angel she had said with her accustomed meekness: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." And yet she wondered more and more as the days went on.

Now at last she understood, at least a little, for in her lap lay sleeping a precious babe. Her own lovely son, her own flesh and blood. Could he be really hers? "Son of the Highest" the angel had announced. Yet here he was such a dear helpless, wee thing seeking his nourishment from her, looking up into her face with those great wistful eyes as if he would have her tell him what kind of a new world this was he had come into. No wonder "she pondered all these things in her heart."

Mother love had come with his birth as it usually does. Strong to endure wakeful nights and anxious hours as she watched and tended through days of sickness and suffering such as all babes are heir to. Mother love, God given, which taught her patience to guide the tottering, timid steps learning to walk, and wisdom to teach the eager little tongue the words of this world's language. Thus the child Jesus grew in years, a comely lad one for a mother to be proud of. Strong in spirit, brave of heart and wise beyond his years, eager to learn to read and with a marvelously retentive memory for the Scripture. Howbeit a boy among boys, full of life and vim, with just this one difference between him and other boys: her lad was always good; not "goody good"—genuinely good, through and through. Never an angry word escaped his lips, much less an untruthful one; always perfectly trustworthy, his Mother's comfort, ever ready to do her bidding. Did other children sometimes notice this unusual faultlessness with taunt and sneer?

Absorbed in teaching her son and giving him the care anybody would need, to Mary the mystery of his birth grew dim—blurred by the constant effort to keep pace with the cravings of his mind for the words of God.

He was fully prepared when his twelfth year came for the ceremony which would admit him to a portion of the privileges and responsibilities of Jewish manhood. With what pride his Mother listened to the surprised commendation of the learned rabbis over his examination and with grateful pleasure she witnessed his enjoyment of every part of the service.

All went well until the caravan of pilgrims had gone a day's journey toward home. They were all friends, neighbors and kinsfolk. When their own little lad was not with them, Joseph and Mary naturally thought he was somewhere in the crowd with other boys of his own age. But some need of him at length revealed the fact that he was nowhere among them and with sorrow and self-reproach they turned back to search for him all along the road they had traveled. He was such a good boy he could not wilfully have strayed from them. Some harm must have befallen him.

Thus with aching hearts they came once again to Jerusalem and searched diligently all their usual haunts in the city. As a last resort, which should have been first, they sought the Temple to offer a prayer for their lost boy, and there they found him in the midst of a group of learned rabbis apparently oblivious of time.

There was a holy zeal and confidence in the pure uplifted face as he asked and answered questions of the gray-haired fathers which made Mary's mother heart quake within her with the old vague doubtings whether he really belonged to her, whether he might not some day be spirited back to heaven. Yet it was the mother who reproved: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing?" His answer only deepened her apprehension: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And she said not a word. Yet when he went with them home and was subject unto them as always before, the mystery of his young life passed out of mind again; only the deep yearning to *hold* him never left her.

As was the custom in all Jewish families, the time soon came for him to learn a trade and he would naturally learn that of Joseph. We may well believe he was faithful and efficient; no shirking, no slighting in his work.

That is all we know of near twenty years, though we may be well assured that in his busiest season he found time for his study of the Scriptures, that his "custom was" to attend the synagogue and the yearly feasts at the Temple at Jerusalem. And so the silent years passed. He grew to be a man, a strong efficient, manly man for it is written "he increased in wisdom and statue and in favor with God and man."

No doubt during this apprenticeship, Mary's fears were allayed by the hope that he would be content to work with Joseph always and stay in the home with her. Yet did not his perfect sinlessness daily remind her that he could not live the life of an ordinary man? Even as she called his name did it not recall the words of the angel to Joseph "He shall save his people from their sins," and lift her hopes to something higher than mere earthly content?

At length the time came when he must choose and enter upon his life's vocation.

We are not told of his farewell to his Mother or whether she appreciated the necessity of his leaving her. Women did not have much to say about such matters in those days. She perhaps knew of his baptism though probably not fully understanding its significance. She was with him at the marriage in Cana, and had the gratification of witnessing his first public miracle and the wonder it excited. Her thoughts must often have followed him with a Mother's yearning pity as she heard of his tireless trudging back and forth with incessant ministries of teaching and healing for the multitude. And when, back from Jerusalem came reports of his fearlessly provoking the enmity of the scribes and priests and leaders of his people by exposing their hypocrisy and selfishness, no wonder she agreed with his brethren that he must be "beside himself" to thus waste and risk his precious life. How much she understood of his mission to this world we know not, but she loved him, more perhaps than any other human being at that time. It may be even already her very love was piercing her soul with dread premonition of she knew not what. However, she knew all about that sword of which old Simeon prophesied, when she stood beside his cross, witnessing his agony, an agony which no human soul can ever fully comprehend, and in the midst of it heard his last tender words to her. Committing her to the care of his best beloved disciple. Ah! she knew then how fierce a sword can pierce a mother's heart, and she loved him more than ever, her precious sinless son, cruelly slain though guiltless.

Later, when she knew him as the risen Christ she loved him with a deeper, holier love for her son had become her Savior and Lord.

# *Love at First Sight*

JOHN THE BAPTIST was preaching on the banks of the Jordan and vast throngs of people were going out from the cities to hear him. There stood beside him one day two young men, John and Andrew of Galilee. They were men who greatly longed for the coming of the King, and hearing of the wonderful prophet who had risen they had come to see and hear if happily they might find in him the one for whom they were longing. And having heard they lingered though they had heard him declare, when asked the question, that he was not the Christ but adding "there standeth one among you whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." John and Andrew were standing close to the prophet eager to catch any clue he might let fall to enable them to discover this greater one.

As they thus stood, a white-clad figure passed through the outskirts of the crowd and John the Baptist raising his voice cried: "Behold the Lamb of God."

We know not how much the preacher understood in these divinely inspired words and the young men did not stay to question nor to see what others thought of them, but, drawn by some mysterious and irresistible impulse they threaded their way through the multitude and followed the white-robed figure. Presently he turned and questioned: "What seek ye?" Somewhat abashed perhaps they hardly knew what to say or how to explain the impulse which was leading them and so replied irrelevantly: "Master where dwellest thou?" There was only the gentlest encouragement in his, "come and see!" and they came and saw where he dwelt and abode with him that day."

What did it matter whether it was palace or hovel? It did not take them long to discover they had found their King. Think of talking with Jesus face to face! They have never told us of what they talked, it was too precious a privilege to be shared.

They were just two fisher lads, perhaps they did not talk at all—just listened. The blessed Master knew all the questions that they were too modest to ask.

Any way, when they left him they were well assured they had been with the King for whom they had so longed and they sought and found their brothers saying: "We have found the Messias." At least Andrew did, as John who records the incident tells us, and we readily infer he did also, as the four were partners and James as well as Peter was one of the early disciples.

Surely the deep impress of that interview colored the whole after life of those two disciples. In John we can mark how the pure responsive love which sprang up in his heart that day grew into the assured confidence which led him to name himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

If at the last John "forsook him and fled" in the Garden when the rest did, at least he was the first to come back. Nor did he "follow him afar off" as Peter did, but went with Jesus into the palace of the high priest, and was still close beside his beloved Master as he hung on the cross, to receive from his dying lips his last charge to care for his Mother. It was a precious trust and John faithfully fulfilled it.

What would it have meant to you or me to have had the privilege of such an interview? Do not our hearts burn within us at the very thought?

Suppose we listen for his "Come and see!" and follow him into some quiet place that he may talk to us and reveal himself to us in his Word until we are enabled to say with Paul: "I know whom I have believed."

# *A Glad Surprise*

JESUS had entered and was passing through Jericho. Zaccheus heard of it and he wanted to see this prophet of Nazareth that everybody was talking about, though he probably could not himself have told why. Already news had come to him of the blind man Jesus had restored to sight outside the city gate, but Zaccheus was not blind. He had no bodily ailment which would give him an excuse for seeking an interview, yet he had the strongest desire to see him.

Zaccheus was a publican. That is he had accepted a position under the hated Roman government. Having taken that step he had in the very act cut himself off from all pleasant intercourse with relatives and former friends. He was a veritable outcast. Then what did it matter how he made his money? He had made money in the way publicans usually did and he was very rich. But he had found out as many another has, that wealth does not necessarily ensure happiness especially if the conscience is pestered by the remembrance of how it had been acquired. It hardly pays for being despised, scorned, avoided. Zaccheus was lonely, unhappy in the midst of his ill gotten gains. He remembered to have heard that this Jesus had one publican among his immediate followers, he had even heard him accused of being partial to publicans and sinners.

As these thoughts passed through his mind Zaccheus felt the desire strengthening. "I must see him!" he would mutter to himself yet he could not bring himself to join that promiscuous crowd, and if he should he was so small of stature he would never be able to get close enough to see.

A bright idea struck him. He hurried round in front of the crowd and climbed a low thick foliaged sycamore tree which hung over the path Jesus would have to take. This was exactly what

Zaccheus wanted, to see, to get a good look at the wonderful new prophet without being seen.

Before Jesus came in sight, he knew what was there, and when he looked up at the little man perched among the thick branches he understood better than Zaccheus did himself why he was there. He knew and pitied the hungry, lonesome, wishful heart of the little publican, and in his face was the love for sinners which was even then urging him on to the cross.

It had been a long time since Zaccheus had seen an expression of kindness or interest on any face turned toward himself and his heart went out to meet it with a great throb of joy as the Master added "Zaccheus make haste and come down, for today I must abide at thy house." And Zaccheus no longer dreaded mingling with the scowling crowd. He a despised publican was to have the prophet a guest in his house. Was it only prideful triumph that filled his heart, as he walked beside the Master and listened to his words? No, some great change was going on within him. He felt like another man. The covetousness that had driven him like a very demon to sacrifice everything to the greed of gain seemed to be slinking away from him. He was eager as soon as he reached the house to pledge half his goods to the poor and to promise with heart-felt contrition to restore fourfold all he had taken from any one dishonestly. What a day that was to Zaccheus! Can you imagine yourself in his place? No matter what went before, what kind of a life you had led, whether really wicked or vile, or selfish and indifferent, or merely careless and procrastinating, to have Jesus invite himself to be your guest to sit down beside you and with tender sympathy to draw you out to tell him all your doubts and difficulties, your sins and short comings, and to comfort you with his love!

May he help us to remember he is always with us when we really want him, when we are ready to turn away from everything else and give him the first place in our thoughts and affections, as ready as he was to reach out and touch the empty yearning heart of Zaccheus.

# *Mary of Magdala*

SOMEWHERE in the country of Magdala there lived a young woman who was sadly afflicted. In our first introduction to her we are told that Jesus had cast seven devils out of her. Think of being subject to the wicked will of seven evil spirits, perhaps each dragging or driving her a different way.

We do not know whether they tormented her physically until her poor body was torn and battered and racked with pain, or whether her mind was distracted with strange wild delusions, or whether they drove her against her will to commit wicked deeds. Nor do we know whether her friends wearied and vexed by her unseemly behavior carried her to Jesus or whether tortured and desperate she had fled from her home and Jesus found her. We only know that somehow, somewhere Jesus met her, had compassion on her, and casting out the devils restored her to normal womanhood. No wonder she loved him. Imagine the relief! Instead of being feared, detested and avoided to find herself amenable to human kindness, to realize that pure and grateful impulses were going out from her heart toward the blessed Master who with a word had delivered her from the inescapable companionship to which she had been in bondage for we know not how long.

No wonder she delighted to minister of her substance to the physical necessities of her deliverer.

And no doubt her thoughtful kindnesses were most acceptable, for Jesus could ill spare the time to earn a livelihood when there were such crying needs of hungry-hearted peoples which only he could relieve.

Mary Magdalene no doubt continued to minister to Jesus of her substance as long as she had opportunity, which was not so very long, for his whole public life was less than three years.

And when at last she stood by the cross watching with horror and anguish the bitter agony of him she loved, knowing there was nothing more she could do for him and wondering at the cruelty of those who caused him thus to suffer, who had spent his life in relieving the troubles of others, how she loved him, not only for what he had done for her in the first place, but more and most for his beautiful faultless life as she had learned to know of it, his tireless healings of the sick, his patient helpfulness to all who were in trouble or perplexity, his constant uplifting, teaching and influence unceasingly turning all thoughts to the life eternal with the Father in heaven. She little knew that his greatest suffering was the burden of sin, which he voluntarily bore that he might present us faultless before his Father.

She watched the last sigh of the departing spirit. Still she lingered, until she knew that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were caring for the precious body and would lay it in his own new tomb, then she went home.

There was just one more loving service left her and before the night closed down she had bought sweet spices and fragrant perfumes to anoint his poor mangled body.

The next day was the Sabbath and its sacred hours were likely spent in nursing her grief and brooding over her loss. Bright and early on the first day of the week she was on her way to the tomb with her burden of sweets to minister once more to the body of the beloved Master.

But, early as it was, the great stone had been rolled away and the sepulcher robbed of its precious inmate. In deep despairing disappointment she was sobbing her heart out at the mouth of the empty tomb when the angels spoke to her. Their question, "Woman, why weepest thou?" did not comfort her. Nor did her tear-dimmed eyes recognize Jesus himself standing near and asking the same question: "Woman, why weepest thou?" Supposing him to be the gardner she cried piteously: "Sir, if thou have borne him hence tell me where thou hast laid him and I will take him away."

Then he called her name in a voice that she knew, and thrilled with inexpressible rapture to find her beloved Master alive. With no thought for the mystery of it she fell at his feet with the glad cry: "Rabboni! dear Master!"

There were forty days for her to learn that he would often be near in spirit when they saw him not, and possibly even before he eventually ascended up to heaven. Mary Magdalene had learned that he could be nearer and dearer sometimes though invisible than he had even been in earthly life, and that the ministry to him which had been such a joy to her she could still bestow for his sake on the least of his followers and it would be accepted as if done to himself.

# *The First and Last Chance*

HE had probably been bad from a boy "going astray telling lies, averse to everything good, the companions of his choice like himself and their whole life made up of evil deeds. Overtaken at last in their wicked ways, and adjudged in the list of vilest criminals, he with one of his associates was condemned to die on the cross.

Death on the cross was considered the most terrible suffering which could be inflicted on any human being. To have great iron spikes driven through the tender flesh and sensitive nerves of hands and feet, and then to have the weight of the body hang from those bleeding limbs. O it was unutterable, horrible. Yet it must have been a little less dreadful to those two rough criminals hardened by exposure and toughened by their rough irregular life, than to the pale emaciated sufferer between them. Not only physically but mentally and morally they were dull of feeling. They felt no pity, no sympathy for the gentle, patient man in their midst.

They caught up the taunts and sneers of the multitude and of those fierce pharisees and scribes and hurled them at him mercilessly. Yet while the cruel, mocking words: "If thou be the Christ save thyself and us" were on their lips one of them grew suddenly silent. He was listening to the low, tender tones of the middle man, the man with the noble spiritual face, committing his mother to the care of his friend. There was something unusual and impressive in his whole bearing. He had heard him while the nails were being driven into his hands pray: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." And now, instead of groaning and cursing his fate and his enemies he seemed to be communing with some unseen power.

Abruptly the silent malefactor rebuked his railing companion, saying: "Dost thou not fear God? we indeed receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss."

It was as if himself had seen a vision, a vision of the heavenly kingdom to which Christ was going and he said unto Jesus: "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Whence came that faith which in those few minutes or hours so changed the mind and heart of the man?

It was not the first sinner Jesus had saved, and his power was not lessened, nay he was even then perfecting his work of redemption so that he could save to the utmost every soul who sought salvation in him and could say to the penitent and believing one beside him: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Thus the thief who perhaps in his whole life before had never known what it was to love or be loved was to die with the happy assurance of an entrance into the kingdom of love and peace, and that it would be in the company of the King who loved him.

# *The Better Part*

THE death on the cross on Calvary was not the only cross Christ endured for us. His whole life was one continuous cross-bearing. Was not his human nature the same as ours?

As you read his life try to put yourself into his place. Suppose for instance the pastor of a church, faithful, conscientious, striving to do his people good, should be rewarded by censorious criticism, by constant effort on the part of leading men of the congregation to trap him in his words or in some way to bring him into an appearance of evil doing. You naturally think any pastor would resign such a position. But Christ could not resign. He had come to this earth to endure the "contradiction of sinners" and whatever else came into the life of man that he might be able to save to the uttermost.

Nor was it only his enemies who grieved and disappointed him. The disciples to whom he gave his most careful teachings often seemed dull to learn and slow to receive his warnings. Their minds were o'er full of what they wanted him to be and do. Was it not one of the chosen twelve who had been with him in closest intimacy for the most of three years who betrayed him? And did not Peter who had again and again professed the greatest devotion, when tempted deny that he knew him? And all of his chosen comrades, "forsook him and fled at the very time of his greatest need of human sympathy. Surely he tasted of all the bitter cups of earthly suffering.

There were three friends who, as far as we know, never failed him; one home where he was always welcome and found an atmosphere of rest and refreshing friendship. We love to think of him after a strenuous day in Jerusalem teaching, healing, comforting the multitude only turning from his works of mercy to meet

with patient tact the covert and malicious attacks of his enemies who were craftily plotting his death. We love to think of him wending his weary way to Bethany to spend the night in that sweet haven of rest—the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

Once they needed him and he was not there. The message which came to him was: "He whom thou lovest is sick." And the record says: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Yet he did not go to them immediately. He might have reached them in time to restore their brother to health, but in order to increase their faith and to give greater glory to God he waited until the brother died, then he went and raised him from the dead.

Martha was a busy, energetic housekeeper. When she knew the Master was coming her thought was for his poor tired body. The softest couch must be made still softer, he must have good nourishing food and plenty of it, and it must be served in the best manner. Then if he were not too tired to talk she would like to sit down and listen. On one occasion when, according to her custom, she was preparing for the beloved Master the daintiest meal she could she came to the door and seeing her sister already enjoying the sweet converse she would fain have shared she said in aggrieved tone: "Master, carest thou not that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" And the Master gently chided her for allowing the things of this world to come first, even for him. "Mary hath chosen the better part," he said. What was that better part?

Did you ever have a friend who instinctively understood what you said and how you felt and never failed to put the right meaning into your words? Some people have this as a gift and it is always a pleasure and comfort to talk to them. Did Jesus explain to Mary as she sat at his feet and listened understandingly the plan of salvation agreed upon between his Father and himself, how he was to bear the sins of the whole world in his life and death? Was this knowledge the "better part?"

Notwithstanding this loving warning to Martha not to let the things of this world get too strong a grip on her affections we find her again serving at the supper given to Jesus near the end of his life by "Simon the Leper."

Who was Simon the Leper?

Some one has suggested that he was possibly Martha's husband. In that case it was natural she should be "serving," and if Jesus had healed him of his leprosy there was a double reason for her to love Jesus.

Martha was really a fine type of Christian character, such as we often admire today. She truly loved the Christ, believed everything he had told her of himself, and when she failed to understand, fell back on her unquestioning faith that he was the Christ of God (John 11:27). Moreover she was always ready to give him faithful service.

Yet, Mary again received the greater commendation. She had taken her most precious treasure, a box of ointment and anointed the feet of their guest until the whole house was filled with the fragrance. Jesus said: "Against my burying hath she kept this."

Evidently Jesus had talked to her of his approaching death as he had frequently to his disciples but she understood and they did not. As she sat at his feet and he told her of the cruel hatred of the priests and rulers of the Jews he must have felt that she comprehended how it hurt him, for he loved his own people, and that she realized somewhat as he did what it must lead to, and while her heart ached with a great yearning sympathy for the suffering of her friend and could not stay the tears fast falling on his feet she yet believed when he told her it behooved him to suffer and die that he might save sinners, and rejoiced with him in confident faith when he added: "But the third day I shall rise again from the dead and be ready at the right hand of God our Father to receive all who come to me."

Was this love-taught understanding of his life's intent, the "Better part" which Mary had chosen? To know that he would die for her a sinner?

Did Jesus think of Martha and her sister and Lazarus, the friends whom he loved, when he led the disciples out as far as Bethany? And were they watching him from their home ascend up into the cloud back to his heavenly home?

O that we too like Mary, might sit at his feet and learn from his blessed Word to understand the full meaning of his earthly life and death and resurrection, to have some genuine appreciation of the great burden of sin he bore for us, and, while our hearts are touched and tendered by the thoughts of his great love and sacrifice be able to lay down at his feet as Mary did all we possess, body, mind, spirit, with whatever God has given us of earthly treasure, that his kingdom may be advanced and that—he may come!

# *Simon Peter*

SIMON was a very different man in many ways from his younger brother Andrew, yet he, as well as Andrew, was eagerly looking for and expecting the Messiah. He knew that the Rabbis and Scribes best versed in the Scriptures believed the time was near for his coming. But what he heard of John the Baptist did not appeal to him. A man of the wilderness, of rough clothing and sharp tongue was not his ideal of the Messiah King, but when Andrew came with a new, glad light in his face and told him he had found the Messiah in the white robed figure he and John had followed to his dwelling place, Simon went with him to see for himself. Was he convinced? Somewhat yet neither was Jesus quite his ideal though he was impressed by the ineffable charm of his person and words.

He was invited with him and others seen with him to the marriage at Cana, and Simon watched him with growing interest. He seemed cordially interested in the happy bridal pair, and in all the innocent enjoyments of the younger guests. He moved freely among them without showing or causing embarrassment, yet if there was one, young or old, on whose face rested a shadow he instinctively sought that one to soothe and sympathize and his tender gracious words had healing in them. There was a great sorrow in Simon's own home. His wife's mother lay sick of a fever. He would like to see him drive the shadow from that dear face with his comforting words and his gracious manner. Might he not even give some relief?

She, the mother, was still ill when Jesus, rejected at Nazareth, came to Capernaum.

As soon as he heard he went straight to Simon's house and not only comforted her but healed her so that she got up and ministered to her guests. By sundown of that day report of the miracle was noised abroad and all who had any sick brought them to be healed.

Simon often felt the lure of the young Nazarene's personality. His eyes at times seem to call him. "And yet,," Simon would say to himself, "surely a man's first duty is to take care of his family," so when the weather was propitious he and Andrew went out in their boat for a catch for they were fishermen.

Perhaps their minds were over full of the wonderful Teacher of Nazareth to watch for the fish, for they had been listening to his words and beholding his marvelous power even to cast out devils yet so modest and unassuming, the words of Scripture came to mind, "My servant shall not strive nor cry in the streets." Simon had a strong feeling that he ought to help him, and of course he would do anything he could, but . . .

Towards morning the boats came in empty and disconsolate. Not often were they so entirely unsuccessful. They were still mending their nets and putting everything in readiness for the day when they spied Jesus of Nazareth on the shore. The crowd had already gathered and were pressing upon him, more than could hear. He beckoned to Simon to take him into the boat, which done Jesus preached to the eager throng from the boat giving a new blessed meaning to the words of Scripture, and the people went home thoughtful and wondering. As Simon gazed into the face of the New Teacher expecting to find him utterly worn out, for he knew the day before had been one long strain of teaching and healing, the face shone with a gladness of pure self-abnegation.

Presently he said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your net."

"Alas, Master, we have toiled all the night and caught nothing." Nevertheless he did his bidding and lo, the net was filled with so great a load of fish that it broke and they hastily called their partners and filled both boats.

In a flash Simon felt as if all the misdeeds and secret sins of his whole life were blazoned out to the eyes of this mysterious stranger and falling at his feet in terror and amaze he cried, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord!"

But Jesus spoke graciously, "Fear not, Simon, from henceforth thou shalt be a fisher of men."

From that time all four of the men, Simon, Andrew and their partners forsook all and followed Jesus.

Did Simon now believe this simple unpretending, homeless teacher was the Messiah? Perhaps, yet where was the kingdom and crown of David promised by the prophets? and how was this humble Nazarene ever to deliver the Jews from the power of Rome? Still, day by day as he walked with him, heard his words of wisdom, and witnessed his miraculous power, it gripped Simon's faith, convinced him here was no mere prophet, his perfect purity and sinlessness alone would prove him more than mortal man. Thus Simon grew to believe in God as he had never done before, the God whom Jesus loved and trusted and prayed to, and in Jesus Himself whom God had sent. Did he now believe that Jesus was the Messiah?

One day when they were alone, such opportunities were rare, Jesus took occasion to question: "Whom say men that I am?" While various answers were being given Simon was watching the face of the Master and as the question followed "but whom say ye that I am? the truth seemed to burst upon him and he exclaimed: 'Thou art the Christ'!"

Jesus did not deny that it was true, though he charged them not to speak of it, for he would soon have to suffer many things even death itself and be definitely rejected by the nation. "O no," Peter interrupted almost rudely, "that cannot be." Whereupon the Master turned to Peter and said sternly: "Get thee behind me Satan!' Poor Peter, one moment to be taught of God the next to be spokesman for Satan, how should he ever know the right thing to say or think!

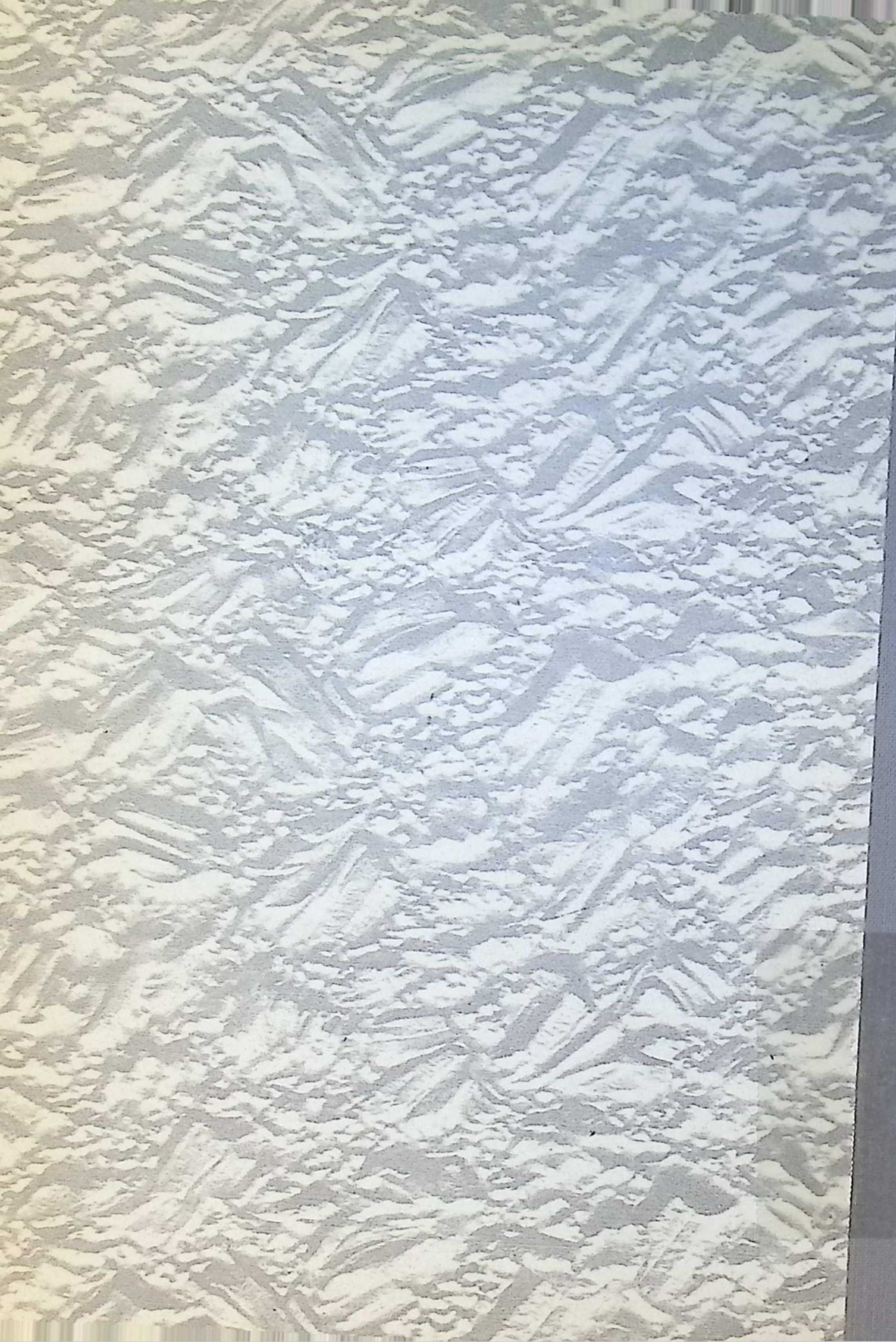
The inscrutable mystery of it all still hung over them as they ate with him the last passover supper, at his bidding divided among them the bread and wine with those touching words in their ears: "Do this in remembrance of me," heard his last discourse and prayer so full of hope and yet so sad. They went with him to the garden. Peter, James and John watched him go off into the darkness to pray as they had often done before. If only they too had prayed as he bade them do instead of sleeping it

might have been the better for Peter. When the soldiers carried off their Master from their very midst, when Peter's passionate impulse to defend him with his single sword had been checked and chided by the Master. Then Peter, in puzzled dismay, fled with the rest, though he did not go far he turned and followed at a distance.

Admitted by John he witnessed from the court the injustice, the mocking indignities, the cruel insults heaped on his beloved Master. Surely he could deliver himself if he chose. When that Roman maid approached him with her taunt of discipleship the very devil of doubt and wrath and wretchedness possessed him.

Three times he swore he knew not his beloved Master, then Jesus turned and looked on him. He had heard those cruel, faithless words. Peter went out and wept bitterly. Who can ever know the depth of his humiliation and remorse? The more he despised himself the more he loved the dear Master who had so gently reproached his dastardly cowardice.

Was it John who told him of the cross? or was he watching from afar? Why could he not have staid bravely by his friend to the last as dear loving John had done? He was just too despicable to lift his head among the dogs.

John found him afterwards and no doubt comforted him as best he could and brought him back to the group of disciples who were clinging together in a common grief.

The first day of the week, early in the morning came the women with news of the empty tomb and the message of the angels: "He is risen, go tell his disciples, and Peter." Those two last words broke Peter's heart if it had not been broken before. Then somewhere, sometime, came that precious interview with the Christ himself. We know not what was said but Peter knew that he loved him still, that he was fully forgiven, and the old impulsive, self-centered, cowardly Simon slipped from him. He was Peter the rock. God's gentleness had made him great, and on the day of Pentecost, filled with the spirit he shone forth the fearless preacher of Christ's mission to earth—to save sinners.